

Bureau of Land Management

Fitness Membership Fee Reimbursement Program Guidelines

Authorities. The current authorities which permit the BLM to offset the costs for employee membership in a private fitness facility and/or to establish fitness centers in Federal facilities are 5 U.S.C. Section 7901 and Comptroller General Decisions B218840 and B240371.

Objectives. The goal of the Fitness Fee Membership Reimbursement Program is to assist employees in establishing and maintaining habits conducive to healthy and productive lifestyles. It is further intended to establish a program that allows for local implementation and lets the needs of employees, regardless of geographic location. Cost effective options should be employed to meet these needs and to establish a program that:

- Delivers high quality services to the greatest number of employees;
- Creates an awareness among employees of the value of health consciousness and the benefit of exercise to individuals, their families and the organization;
- Provides flexibility to accommodate the identified needs of the various office locations and promote maximum employee participation;
- Demonstrates sound financial management practices and prudent expenditures of available funds by each BLM location; and
- Adds to the list of benefits available to BLM employees to facilitate recruitment and retain a highly skilled and talented workforce.

Responsibilities. The Assistant Directors, State Directors and Center Directors are responsible for choosing whether to develop an offset payment program within their workforce. If such a program is adopted, it must apply to the entire workforce with equal consideration. At the end of each fiscal year each office will provide a summary report to the Assistant Director, Human Capital Management on the number of participants, costs and type(s) of programs utilized.

As a minimum, it is suggested that each Assistant Director, State Director and Center Director designate a fitness coordinator or committee to oversee the program. Coordinator and/or Committee responsibilities might include such items as:

- Developing and compiling the results of an employee survey to determine the needs and interests of employees;
- Canvassing local area fitness organizations to determine local availability and cost of fitness related services;
- Making final recommendations to Management;
- Providing information to employees concerning the program; and

- Developing local procedures to implement and monitor the program to include maintaining records, preparing reports, etc.

Employee Eligibility. Participation in the off-site commercial fitness facilities cost-sharing with BLM is limited to permanent full-time, part-time employees and employees on time limited appointments of one year or more. Participation is strictly voluntary. To be eligible for reimbursement, the employee must agree to participate in fitness activities at least two times per week for at least a half an hour per visit. Employees will be expected to continue their membership for no less than one year, absent medical conditions(s) or extenuating circumstances.

Selection of Commercial Physical Fitness Facilities. Facilities considered for inclusion in local fitness program offerings should include a full complement of exercise equipment and programs for cardiovascular and body strengthening. Facilities should also have appropriate mechanisms of procedures to minimize the possibility of personal injury, e.g., guidelines posted for proper use of machines, onsite training personnel for instruction on machine use, fitness testing, etc. Facilities should be compared based in their offerings of basic program needs. Additional amenities outside of the basics (i.e., gymnasiums, tennis, and racquetball courts) may be included in the program, but should not serve as the basis for choosing one facility over another, especially in cases where additional costs will be incurred by the BLM as a result.

Activities such as baseball, softball, basketball, bowling, golf, tennis, volleyball, etc., project a recreational image and are not approved fitness activities for which BLM will make reimbursement.

The fitness facilities must be non-segregated facilities wherein membership and use are not restricted by sex, race, national origin, color, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation.

Individual Employee Contracted. Employees may be individually contracted for access to private fitness centers exercise facilities if the facilities meet the requirements identified above under “Selection of Commercial Physical Fitness Facilities.” Employees will be reimbursed for 50 percent of an individual membership fee up to \$275 per year, whichever is less.

Waiver and Informed Consent Statement. Prior to actual participation, the employee must sign a Waiver and Informed Consent Statement (Attachment 2). This waiver must be renewed each year. The employee will be provided a copy of the statement and the original is to be maintained on file.

Reimbursement Procedures. Program participating employees are advised to get a medical examination prior to engaging in the fitness program. The employee is financially responsible for the medical examination.

BLM will only reimburse individual membership fees. Initiation fees will not be covered. If an employee has a family membership, the employee must provide documentation of the cost for an individual membership. BLM will base the 50 percent reimbursement on that amount. The employee will still need to provide proof of payment for membership fees in order to receive reimbursement. The Government issued Bank of America Travel Card cannot be used for payment of this taxable fringe benefit.

Locations that have elected to reimburse employees for part of their individual membership may make reimbursement to employees every six months. Employee's who pay on a monthly or quarterly basis, may submit multiple receipts covering the previous six months. Employees who pay on a yearly basis may be reimbursed for the entire year upon filing for reimbursement.

For an employee to be reimbursed, the Attachment 2 - Informed Consent and Waiver Form, Attachment 3 - Report of Taxable Fringe Benefit (Fitness Center Reimbursement Fees), Attachment 4 - Self-Certification of Usage and the employee's proof of payment must be submitted to the National Business Center, Accounts Payable Branch, BC-622 for processing.

Payment is not authorized for an employee's failure to meet their commitment due to an unexcused absence. Excused absences include work activities that take the employee away from their official duty station, illness, extended annual leave and extended family illness or emergencies. Determinations concerning whether an absence will be considered excused or unexcused will be made by the local manager in consultation with the State Human Resources Officer if necessary. Should an employee's fitness activities fall below the threshold as outlined in this policy without an excused absence; the supervisor will give the employee notification to meet the commitment. If usage does not increase to the minimum level with the month following notification, enrollment in the program will be terminated for 6 months. A second failure to meet the agreed commitment will prohibit future use of the program.

Tax Liability. Actual reimbursement will be made through the Federal Personnel and Payroll System (FPPS) and will be included in an employee's salary payment. The amount is a taxable benefit and will be reported as taxable income to the Internal Revenue Service. The employee will be subject to Federal, FICA, Medicare, State and local taxes.

Termination of Participation. An employee may terminate his/her participation at any time by informing the supervisor in writing of his/her desire to do so. An employee will only be reimbursed for the number of months he/she actually participated in fitness activities. For example, an employee who pays a membership fee in advance for a one year period and terminates his/her participation in this program after one month will receive appropriate reimbursement based on only 1 ½ of the annual fee.

Time and Attendance Issues. Only law enforcement officers and firefighters can use official time for fitness activities due to the physical requirements and rigorous duties of these positions. All other employees may use the fitness centers during their lunch break in accordance with the policies governing their specific work schedule. Employees may also seek advance approval to use accrued credit time, compensatory time off or annual leave to participate in a fitness program. Supervisors are encouraged to cooperate with employees who wish to adjust their work schedule to include their lunch period in order to use the fitness facilities.

Labor Relations Obligations. Locations whose employees are represented by a labor organization must meet their obligations under the Federal Service Labor Management Relations Statute and any existing collective bargaining agreement obligations. Notification and bargaining with the employee's representative may be required prior to implementation of a local fitness program. Please consult your collective bargaining agreement and the serving Personnel Office to determine if an obligation exists and for assistance with the bargaining process.